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## SHAPING THE VALUE OF RESPECTING THE DIGNITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION FOR PEACE: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

### KSZTAŁTOWANIE WARTOŚCI POSZANOWANIA GODNOŚCI OSÓB Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIAMI W KONTEKŚCIE EDUKACJI NA RZECZ POKOJU: ANALIZA I IMPLIKACJE

**Streszczenie:** Edukacja na rzecz pokoju jest jedną z podstaw dobrze funkcjonującego społeczeństwa i warunkiem zapewnienia godności każdej jednostce. Włączenie jak największej liczby osób, w tym osób z niepełnosprawnościami, do pełnego uczestnictwa w społeczeństwie realizowane jest m.in. w obszarze edukacji. W przedstawionym artykule przeprowadzono wtórną analizę jakościowych danych podstawowych, dotyczących wartości leżących u podstaw edukacji i wychowania jako wysiłków na rzecz promowania kultury pokoju. Kształtowanie pozytywnych postaw społecznych u dzieci i młodzieży, akceptacja i szacunek dla wszystkich osób, niezależnie od ich niepełnosprawności, może stworzyć społeczeństwo oparte na wartościach pokoju i godności każdej osoby.

**Słowa kluczowe:** osoba z niepełnosprawnością, godność, edukacja na rzecz pokoju

**Abstract:** Education for peace is one of the foundations of a well-functioning society and a prerequisite for ensuring the dignity of every individual. The inclusion of as many individuals as possible, including people with disabilities, to participate fully in society is achieved, among other things, through education. In the article presented here, a secondary analysis of qualitative foundational data was carried out, addressing the issue of values underpinning education and upbringing in efforts to promote a culture of peace. The formation of positive social attitudes in children and adolescents, acceptance and respect for all people, regardless of their disabilities, can create a society based on the values of peace and dignity of each person.

**Keywords:** person with disabilities, dignity, education for peace

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## Introduction

Educational activity should promote the paradigm of “coexistence,” which implies the possibility of development as a result of the interaction of all its participants. Education in modern Europe must encourage people to open up to each other, for them to present their values, feelings, and needs, which will allow – while preserving their own identity – to adapt more quickly and effectively to new conditions and foster mutual appreciation (Nikitorowicz 2007). According to C. Taylor, the modern individual simultaneously feels the need for dignity (equal rights) and recognition (not only of the person, but also of nationality and tradition). Despite their external and internal capabilities, individuals are unable to be self-sufficient and need Others to build their identity (Taylor 1995).

In the process of education and self-education, as a way of learning about the world and coming to terms with it, the science of values – axiology, both general and pedagogical – guides and assists people in forming their attitude to the world, understanding rights and duties, and forming educational and life plans (Banach 2001).

Attempts to explain why people with disabilities are treated differently have been made in the literature by numerous researchers (W. Dykcik, S. Byra, M. Chodkowska, Z. Kazanowski, M. Winiewski, A. Haska, and others). The purpose of the study is to conduct a secondary analysis of qualitative foundational data addressing the issue of the values underpinning education and upbringing as activities for a culture of peace. The task of secondary qualitative analysis is to generate and synthesize meanings from a wide variety of studies (Borowska-Beszta et al. 2017). A strategy of Aggregated Analysis, combining, analyzing, and synthesizing the results of various studies on education and peace education, was undertaken to develop a theory on the formation of the value of respecting the dignity of another human being, in this case, a person with a disability.

The sociological concept of E. Goffman, which attempts to explain the phenomenon of stigma, states that “the manipulation of stigma is a general characteristic of society, it is a process that occurs wherever there are norms relating to identity” (Goffman 1979). Two characteristics dominate the stereotype of a disabled person: one is weakness, and the other is the lack of acceptance and social isolation of this group (Kawczyńska-Butrym 1996). According to E. Aronson, prejudice against certain social, racial, or religious groups has many causes. He identifies the main causes as 1. economic and political rivalry or conflict; 2. displaced aggression; 3. personality needs; and 4. conformism to existing social norms (Aronson 1995). These four causes listed can operate simultaneously or independently. It is relatively easy to explain the causes of prejudice against specific racial or religious groups, but much more difficult to explain the sources of prejudice against people with disabilities, who, for many reasons, cannot pose a threat or

competition to fully able-bodied people. Removing architectural or communication barriers is much easier than removing the barrier of social prejudice.

An important part of peace education is education about diversity, tolerance, and acceptance of others. It is important that people with disabilities are treated as full members of society and that their differences are seen as an added value, not a reason for discrimination. The values at the heart of peace education include respect for human dignity, acceptance of equality, solidarity with the less privileged, action against injustice, and interpersonal relations, and personal responsibility for peacekeeping (Wesołowska 1998). Children and young people should be taught empathy and the ability to understand the perspective of others. Educating society in respect and tolerance, and ensuring universal access to all public facilities for people with disabilities, can result in a gradual change in social attitudes. Taking comprehensive and thoughtful measures can ultimately allow for better social integration of people with disabilities and forge a new, coherent system of social inclusion, in which all have equal rights.

### **Axiological aspects of education for peace**

Nowadays, education is expected to help educators discover their own abilities and understand the world, themselves, and other people through the development of empathetic attitudes, emotionality, sensitivity, and non-schematic thinking. Above all, it prepares individuals for proper and responsible valuing and living in accordance with chosen values that do not interfere with the values of others (Świtała 2019). Values are the foundation of the upbringing process and the basis of any system, program, or single educational activity. They are extremely valuable to a person, being an essential element of needs, and are objective and universal in nature. The importance of education for the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful, and democratic societies is taking on a new dimension today.

Among the popularisers of education for peace are some of the greatest names in history: from Immanuel Kant to Mahatma Gandhi, Maria Montessori to Janusz Korczak. The study of peace is interdisciplinary research conducted on the basis of philosophy, sociology, psychology, political science, history, and also pedagogy. Pope Paul VI was the first to use the term “peace pedagogy” in 1969, and in the following years, the term was popularized by UNESCO. The term “pedagogy of peace” has a broad meaning and includes issues of educational theory and practice. Concepts such as “education for peace” have also taken a permanent place in pedagogy. Among the researchers of this topic were B. Suchodolski, S. Kawula, E.A. Wesołowska, I. Wojnar, H. Gajdamowicz, A. Piejka, and others (Leek 2014). Educators and institutions engaged in promoting the idea of education for peace emphasize that the essence of tolerance and the related urgent need to create a culture of peace lies in integration. This is the basis for building a society based on peace. It is meant to foster mutual rapprochement and “being together” — a society

in which everyone feels respected as fully dignified citizens, ordinary residents of the country, and complete human beings. The practical dimension of peace education provides an opportunity to educate the younger generation in values such as tolerance, respect for other cultures and nationalities, and a commitment to social dialogue. It counteracts and opposes social phenomena such as racism, discrimination, and intolerance towards others (Szymik 2023). Values are the main patterns that guide the behavior and views of members of a society or social group, defining the criteria of what is desirable. They enable us to distinguish the good from the bad and the beautiful from the ugly. Values are “ways of behaving, acting, and thinking considered appropriate by an individual, social group, or society” (Brèmond et al. 2008, p. 219). Educational situations should convey values, contain content filled with values, include appropriate educational methods and didactic means, and assume educational goals and objectives that take values into account. After all, not only what we teach, but also how we teach it, is important. The guide of educational situations should itself be a bearer of values.

Education for peace is formal, informal, and non-formal education (Coombs & Ahmed 1974), encompassing the upbringing and education of children, adolescents, and adults. Its aim is to awaken public vigilance, mobilize the conscience of humanity for peace, and prepare people to resolve conflicts without violence, listen to others with compassion, and express themselves sincerely (Kawula 1980). According to Aristotle, “[...] the legislator should be concerned first and foremost with the education of the young. If this does not happen in the state, then the system suffers, since the citizens must be properly educated for peace” (Aristotle, 1964, p. 214).

A properly formed self-image and group identity, embedded in culture, allow one to recognize Others — their differences, similarities, and interdependencies. It is important to form one’s own identity, because “a person has no other way to form a self-image, self-concept, or identify with someone if they have not found a reference group, i.e., people significant to them, and cultural heritage” (Nikitorowicz 2007). All educational activities for peace build a culture of peace in a broad sense. UNESCO’s postulates define a culture of peace as “a culture of coexistence and sharing with the Other, based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, tolerance and solidarity; a culture that rejects violence, seeks to prevent conflicts at their source and solve problems through dialogue and negotiation; a culture that ensures full rights for all and the possibility of full participation in the endogenous development of society” (Mayor & Bindém 2001).

It is worth noting that viewing the experience of otherness and the relationship with the Other as pedagogical categories undoubtedly brings with it many aspects that can create changes of an educational nature. In education for peacebuilding, it is crucial to prepare individuals to recognize actions that promote peace in different situations. This requires special sensitivity, imagination, a sense of agency, and creativity. Education for peace must also focus on the diverse, often contradictory

emotions that arise in an individual when encountering the Other or in situations of dispute, tension, and conflict (Piejka 2021). According to the UN definition, the essence of education for peace is “the process of promoting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that lead to the prevention of conflict and violence [...], to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and to the creation of conditions conducive to peace both at the interpersonal, intergroup, national and international levels. This requires participation at many levels such as the family, school, workplaces, newspaper offices, playgrounds, communities, as well as the nation” (Rosa 2007).

The globalization processes of the modern world require a revision of the education system, and from this perspective, the functions of education should be viewed differently. Education occurs in three developmental spheres: first in the course of individual growth, then in the process of integrating into society, and finally in the introduction to values, where the individual acquires cultural competence (Radlińska 1961). According to Bogdan Suchodolski, the program of education for societies is a program of the pedagogy of dialogue, reconciliation, and coexistence. Education should manifest in efforts to create a world in which every nation has a real right to happiness and full development (Suchodolski 1985). Education for peace is considered education for peace, mutual understanding, and respect for the dignity of each person (Kawula 1988).

### **Dignity of a person with disabilities**

The interdisciplinarity and multidimensionality of the concept of disability are of utmost importance in common law. There is no single, common definition of the concept of disability. Disability has many dimensions; it can be physical, intellectual, or social. Different legal acts use a variety of terms to describe disability or a disabled person. Additionally, obsolete or pejorative terms, such as „disability”, „invalid”, „handicap”, and „underdevelopment”, are often encountered. When creating a legal definition of disability, the science of law is obliged to use thoughtful words that convey the sense and meaning contained in definitions from other sciences, while also being effective in the implementation of legal norms relating precisely to disability. This is crucial because disability concerns human beings, their sense of dignity, acceptance, and empathy expressed by society, but also felt and realized in personal, professional, and public life (Kurowski 2014).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has introduced three concepts of disability that take into account a person’s health status: impaired (impairment) – any impairment or abnormality in the structure or functioning of the body in psychological, psychophysical, or anatomical terms; disabled (disability) – any limitation or inability (resulting from an impairment) to lead an active life in the manner or to the extent that is considered typical for a human being; and limitations in the performance of social functions (handicap) – a disadvantage of a specific person resulting from an incapacity or disability, limiting or preventing

the full realization of a social role that corresponds to age, gender, and is in accordance with social and cultural conditions (Wilmowska-Pietruszyńska & Bilski 2013).

Barbara Gąciarz, analysing the definitions of disability contained in various laws, states that a characteristic feature of the terms and definitions contained in them is, firstly, the accentuation of the economic aspect of disability expressed in the degree of ability to work and the ability to independently obtain means of subsistence, and secondly, the focus on the deficits of a person with a disability and the possibilities for him or her to act in accordance with social expectations (Gąciarz 2014).

It seems reasonable to raise the question of the compatibility of current regulations with the principle of human dignity expressed in Article 30 of the Polish Constitution, as well as in Article 3 of the Convention. This concern arises because it appears contrary to the principle of dignity to fail to recognize a person's potential and to create a legal system that imposes a conceptual framework, making it impossible to accurately assess the degree of disability without using pejorative and often untrue terms. The current system causes a great deal of discomfort for many people with disabilities, as they often have to accept certificates with untrue and pejorative terms in order to receive the support they need (Kurowski 2014).

It is worth examining the lexical wording of the two terms: „disabled person” and „person with a disability”. In the first case, the use of the adjective form is essential, as it attributes the characteristic of disability to a person. In contrast, when using the term „person with a disability”, the noun form does not specify the characteristic as defining the person. The concept of a „person with a disability” seems to be broader than „disabled person”, which is associated with a visible impairment or a medical determination of disability (Mikołajczyk 2012, p. 134). The argument for the concept of „person with a disability” was undertaken by Dariusz Galasiński, who believes that „disabled person” encloses that person in their disability, constructing them as a person with a single attribute, which is disability. This leads to stigmatization and blurs the social roles that the person can fulfil. In contrast, the concept of „person with a disability” refers to an attribute that „does not define this person and can be disconnected from them, at least in the social space” (Galasiński 2013, pp. 3-4).

The way we talk about ourselves and use our language is very important because language constructs reality. In a broad philosophical sense, „other” is everything that is not „me”, but at the same time, I myself am part of everything that is „other”. The „other” is the entire world around me and me in this world. The basic relationship becomes a person's relationship with themselves and with other people, a relationship with the world, which I recognize and experience in very different ways (Rzeźnicka-Krupa 2013). Another person may be perceived as different because of the attributes that characterize or are attributed to them (e.g., a different nationality, religion, or being a person with a disability). It is

important that „other” does not mean inferior, which arouses fear and negative social attitudes. Today, a person is often treated only in terms of empirical being, and their dignity is graded according to use value, material, and social benefits. In such a conceptualized and arranged world, a person with a disability cannot find a place for themselves and often feels like a completely superfluous entity. This situation calls into question the dignity of humanity (Bochenek 2003; Krąpiec 1974).

Analysing the literature, one can find two meanings of the concept of dignity as a characteristic: innate (ontic) and acquired (social, cultural). The social aspect shows a human being as a person who values positive interpersonal relations, themselves as well as the group to which they belong (Chalas 2006; Szawarski 1983). In this view, dignity is acquired or bestowed, and thus depends on a person's place in society; on gender, race, religion, or culture. It is hierarchical, which means that a person can lose, violate, or have their dignity taken away. On the other hand, ontically understood, dignity belongs to all people and is an absolute, inherent, universal, non-transferable, inalienable, inviolable value. Having dignity is intrinsic to being human, and to be human is to be a person, to have dignity and to be distinguished by dignity (Bronk 2012). However, in the Dictionary of the Polish Language edited by Mieczysław Szymczak, it is defined as “a sense, awareness of one's own worth, self-respect; honour, pride”. It is worth noting that, according to the cited source, honour and pride are defined as “a sense of personal dignity,” hence the opinion can be formulated that the dictionary understanding of dignity essentially boils down to the concept of “a sense of dignity” (Mikrut 2013, p. 386). Other authors point out the need to distinguish dignity from a sense of dignity. Thus, a sense of dignity is revealed by a person “who is aware of his own qualities, fully accepts them, which evokes self-respect, pride in his qualities” (Mikrut 2013, p. 386). The internal belief in one's dignity is measured subjectively and plays a certain role in one's ability to bestow dignity on other people (Chudy 1999).

Undoubtedly, the above definitions that we find in the studies not only fail to exhaust the issue of “dignity”, but raise doubts and questions: what about people who have impairments that prevent efforts to raise dignity or gain it through their own actions? The answer is brought by philosophical and theological considerations, pointing to the existence of personal dignity, a dignity to which all people are entitled. Personal dignity is independent of the state of the human body. No impairment can affect the core of one's humanity or the essential parts of their being (Chudy 1988). The good protected primarily by Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland is precisely the personal dignity of every human being. It is worth emphasizing: “The inherent and inalienable dignity of man is the source of freedom and rights of man and citizen. It is inviolable, and its respect and protection is the duty of public authorities”. It is worth noting that human dignity, as a constitutional category, refers to the solutions adopted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its meeting in Paris on December 10, 1948, while the Preamble to the Convention on

the Rights of the Child reads, “[...] in accordance with the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world [...]”.

The discussion of the dignity of people with disabilities takes place on many levels and has both negative and positive aspects. People with disabilities increasingly feel that their dignity is being brought into discussions of socially and ethically controversial issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, violence, and abuse. The issue of dignity also arises when it relates to the work and success of people with disabilities. This is when they are viewed through the lens of social inclusion, although the term “normalization” is frequently used (Westcott & Cross 1996, p. 13). People with disabilities negatively perceive the social changes that are taking place – they develop a sense of loneliness and confusion in the world of new, incomprehensible rules and norms of behaviour promoted in the changed reality of values. In a world where consumption, competitiveness, and rivalry are so common in acquiring desirable goods, these forces seem to shape modern identities. Consequently, children, adolescents, and adults marked by disability are inundated with a wave of social insecurity, unemployment, growing pauperization, and stigmatization. They are also excluded from many aspects of social life (Radziejewicz-Winnicki 2001).

Axiological education and upbringing towards values becomes an important task. According to K. Stępień, upbringing aimed at personal dignity consists in “overcoming and visualizing to the upbringing in themselves and in other persons, homing in on the values of dignity, so that they recognize its obliging power to act” (Stępień 2016, p. 383). Dignity as an educational goal and source of tasks for the school is a barrier to ethical relativism. The place of a person’s dignity within the goals of education becomes paramount. They are determined by its phenomenon – for it determines the value of a person and represents a fixed, inherent, unquestionable value. These characteristics provide upbringing with a strong axiological foundation, making dignity the priority goal of upbringing. This implies respect for one’s own dignity and the dignity of others (Chąlas 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Peace education, as defined by UNICEF, is the promotion of knowledge, skills, attitudes, as well as the values necessary to induce a change in behaviour that will give the younger generation and adults the opportunity to prevent conflict and violence (Leek 2014). The values that constitute the essence of peace are human rights, freedom, solidarity, democracy, tolerance, dialogue, and coexistence (community). People with disabilities consciously participate in the creation of their own life plans, becoming resilient to the dangers of bodily dysfunction and situations that



threaten their sense of self-dignity. Among the demands of people with disabilities, we find the right to an independent, fully valued life, allowing them to develop their potential and function well in society. Thus, the foundation of a dignified society is the distinctiveness, freedom, and possibility of realization in society that belongs to every person, including people with disabilities. It encompasses both rights and duties: the right of a person to become their true self, to freely express thoughts and feelings, the right to study, work, and stay healthy, and the right to spiritual and physical development. Duties primarily involve responsibility for oneself, one's family, others, society, and the world. This responsibility extends to one's words and actions. These are the choices that allow one to live for oneself and others. Dignity involves reconciling one's independence, separateness, and disability with the common good (Garbat 2016).

The increasing presence of people with disabilities in the mass media, presenting their professional, educational, social, and personal achievements, as well as showing their daily struggles, could not only mark the presence of people with disabilities in social life but broaden public understanding of their abilities, talents, and needs. Expanding public awareness in this way helps break stereotypical perceptions about people with disabilities.

In summary, among the challenges of education and peace education, a key focus is on shaping young people in the areas of knowledge about themselves, others, their world, values, and the methods by which these values can be achieved. This learning process should avoid simplifications, shortcuts, and distortions regarding the process of valuing the world and people. It involves fostering tolerance toward Others, including respect for values cherished in other cultures that promote human development. Sensitization to other people, including those with disabilities, is essential. Motivating reflection on oneself and the world and encouraging self-awareness. Finally, an extremely important area is fostering attentiveness and concentration: attentive dialogue with others and oneself. Education should encourage self-education, realizing through education the idea of axiologically creating a person and the duty to make the world a better place (Cudowska 2018, p. 33).

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